“CULTURE AND IDENTITY IN ZORA NEALE HURSTON AND BAMA FAUSTINA’S SELECT NOVELS : A COMPARATIVE STUDY”

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Culture and Identity in Zora Neale Hurston and Bama Faustina's Select Novels: A Comparative Study

Introduction:

The present research work seeks to compare the culture and identity experienced by the African- American woman and the Dalit woman of India. Two representative authors have been chosen for the present study- Zora Neale Hurston from Afro-American woman and Bama from the Indian Dalit woman. This research work is an attempt to explore the images of cultural experiences, slavery, traditional bound society and conventional women in the selected novels. The research work tries to analyse how these writers explore their voices of experience of the cultural ideology and identity. It also tries to focus on identity, casteism, racism, gender bias, color discrimination, slavery and marginalization. Women's marginalization is an old story. Women have been regarded as submissive to men since a long time. Most of the marginalized group all over the world has a particular system of oppression in their social context. In India it is under the structure of the casteism and in the Western world it is under the name of the Racism. Inequality was the main source of this marginality which led to insecurity, injustice and exploitation. Marginalized sections were always on the periphery and put away from the power centers. So the emergence of the marginalized literature has a great historical significance.

Black literature aroused out of the 'literature of slaves' and the Dalit's emerged from the 'literature of untouchables'. The Blacks and Dalits, were considered the most disenfranchised and disadvantaged groups anywhere in the world. They faced oppression based on a circumstance as

absurd as the accident of birth. In present study the term 'Black' refers to people with a particular skin color who were forced to migrate from the African continent to the United States and were therefore also known as 'Afro-Americans', whereas the term 'Dalit' refers to people belonging to numerous castes that are at the lowest rank of the Indian social ladder of caste system.

The study is an attempt to define man's quest for identity and culture in life. Men's and women's quest for self-liberation are attained by their discovery of the inner self. This journey of self-discovery progresses with woman's realization of her relationship with the world around her. Every individual has a search for the self-identity. Identification of his requirements, both internal and external leads to his self-fulfillment. According to Franz Fanon (1925-1961), identity is neither a prior, nor a finished product; it is only the problematic process of access to an image of totality (2008: xxix). One of the most problematic and ever developing concepts in literary and critical studies is the search for identity or the sense of selfhood. Recently, it continues to become an obsession of critics, novelists and scholars. Expressions such as man, woman, body, self, person, individual, I, subject, and human, all have been repetitively used in literary and critical consideration to refer to the identity of a certain person belonging to a particular community or tradition. John Locke (1632-1704), an English philosopher and physician is regarded as one of the most influential of enlightened thinkers, presented his theory of mind which is often cited as the origin of modern conception of 'identity' and 'self'. He is the first to define 'self' as continuity of consciousness. He defines 'self' as;

> ". . . that conscious thinking thing [whatever substances, made up of whether spiritual or material or compounded, it

matters not] which is sensible conscious of pleasure and pain, capable of happiness and misery, and is considered for itself as for that consciousness extends" (Locke "Of Identity and Diversity" page.4)

The proposed research work focus on the novels of Zora Neale Hurston, namely *Jonah's Gourd Vine* (1934), *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937), *Moses, Man of the Mountain* (1939), and *Seraph on the Suwanee* (1948). And Bama Faustina's *Karukku (*1992), *Sangati (*1994), *Vanmam: Vendetta* (2003).

Zora Neale Hurston was born on 7th January 1891 in Notasulga, Alabama, America; she portrayed racial struggle in the early-1900s. Bama Faustina is one of the prominent Tamil Catholic Dalit writer. She was born on 14th March 1958 into the Paraya community in Tamil Nadu, a community of agricultural labourers that occupies the lowest strata of the caste ridden hierarchical society. As these writers belong to Black and Dalit community, their works are a manifestation and representation of the individual as well as collective self of a Black and Dalit.

Statement of the Research Problem:

The main thrust of the research topic is to analyze the culture and identity in the pretext of Black and Dalit novelist selected novels. The different oppressions the women characters of Zora Hurston and Bama encounter at the social, cultural and religious fronts. Hence, this research work tried to focus on the problems regarding them, who have faced multiple problems like culture, identity, caste, race gender, poverty, deprivation and social exclusion.

Research Methodology:

The research methods adopted for this research work are descriptive, analytical and explorative type in which feminist perspective has been used. It is quite clear that textual research is conducted. Phule-Ambedkarite perspective has emerged in Maharashtra as new research method to study the Dalit literature and other works from social sciences. These approaches try to find and analyze the problems from Mahatma Phule and Dr. Ambedkar's point of view. Therefore, investigation, analysis and evaluation are the three pivotal research methods, which are applied in carrying out this particular research study. To accomplish the objectives of the present study in order to validate the hypothesis of the study; various literary methods have been used.

The Objectives of the Present Study:

The objectives of the research study are as follows:

1) To understand how the selected writers have explored subjectivity in connection with an identity.

2) To analyze the experience of the cultural ideologies and traditions in the novels of Zora Neale Hurston and Bama as they redefine culture and identity.

3) To elucidate the native consciousness in Black and Dalit women's selected novels.

4) To analyze the representation of discriminatory experiences in which race, caste and gender intersect.

5) To examine the discourses of the Civil Rights Movement and the way women's movement influenced articulations of experienced racism and sexism in Black women's novels.

7) To analyze the perspectives of Afro-American and Dalit culture towards their women.

Hypothesis of the study:

1) The study tries to focus that how these Black and Dalit writers recognized their own identity in their respective cultures.

2) The various socio-cultural aspects of the respective communities are responsible for the deprivation of the Black and Dalit women's individuality.

3) The predicament of the women is the same either in the society of the Blacks among the whites or in the community of Dalits among the upper castes.

4) Every individual has a search for the self-identity. Identification of his requirements, both internal and external leads to his self-fulfillment.

5) Humanity vastly has been divided into different genders and people discriminate each other in the name of gender.

6) The study also tries to show how and when these women writers articulate culture, race, caste and gender as oppressive structure and became conscious to this state and assert their own identity as human being.

Data Collection/ Data Analysis:

Data collection will be divided into primary sources and secondary sources. The primary sources of the research work consist of four novels entitled *Jonah's Gourd Vine* (1934), *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937), *Moses, Man of the Mountain* (1939), and *Seraph on the Suwanee* (1948) by Zora Neale Hurston and three novels by Bama Faustina entitled as *Karukku (*1992), *Sangati (*1994), *Vanmam: Vendetta* (2003) . In addition to this, the other works by these writers are also used. The background materials of

these select writers, the critical material on the present writers as well as the reference material which is taken from books and articles are the body of the secondary sources which are used for the research study.

The secondary sources are from three roots:

I) Print Media material

II) Non-print media materials

III) E-media material. These three will be used for data collection and data- analysis.

Scope and Limitation of the Research:

The present research work *entitled Culture and Identity in Zora Neale Hurston and* Bama Faustina's *Select Novels: A Comparative Study* is to be undertaken within the scope of select Black and Dalit Women's novels. Zora Neale Hurston's novels, namely *Jonah's Gourd Vine* (1934), *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937), *Moses, Man of the Mountain* (1939), and *Seraph on the Suwanee* (1948) and Bama Faustina's *Karukku (*1992), *Sangati (*1994), *Vanmam: Vendetta* (2003) have been selected for the detailed analysis and for the validation of the hypothesis.

Review of Literature:

Number of research work have been done on Afro-American and Dalit novel, but the critical endeavor is not applicable. People have interrupted African American's quest for identity with all its stages, features, implications and problems as presented in African American novel. Some of have examined the complex problem of identity of the Afro-American in

terms of their research. Some scholars have innovated the fictional canon of Paule Marshall and stressed Marshall Commitment to the Afro-American women. They researched on Race Gender and Identity and also explored the Afro-American feminist fiction from Harriet Wilsotn to Paul Marshall.

As far Dalit literature is concerned, Researchers have focused on the socio-cultural protest with the help of their research work. Some scholars explored space or power of the Dalit's in their research. In the other word, number of researchers have done their work on Dalit Literature in India. Common issues are found in Afro-American Literature also. Such as caste, Gender in India and racism in Afro-American. Thus the researcher intends to study caste, race and politics in the select novels to set a new perspective in the field of literary research.

Tentative chapter scheme

Chapter I: Introduction

The first chapter of the thesis sketches the objectives of the study and its significance. This chapter tries to bring out a chronological survey of literature in the context of culture and identity in Afro-American and Dalit women's writing. In this chapter an attempt has been made to define the various terminologies and historical graph of American and Dalit cultures. Researcher will focus on the overview and scope of novels. The first chapter will try to cover the brief history of Black and Dalit literature.

Chapter II: Portrayal of Culture and Identity in Zora Neale Hurston's Novels

This chapter will explore the theoretical relation among culture and identity discourse. It will try to examine the cultural discourse of the Civil Rights Movement and the racialized discourse in the novels of Zora Neale Hurston's novels, namely *Jonah's Gourd Vine* (1934), *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937), *Moses, Man of the Mountain* (1939), and *Seraph on the Suwanee* (1948). It will try to demonstrate the influence of the Civil Rights and Women's Movement discourses and also elucidate a distinctive pattern in the writer's articulations of gender and race.

Chapter III: Portrayal Culture and Identity in Bama Faustina's Novels

In this chapter an attempt will be made to analyze and evaluate the thematical designs of novels of Bama Faustina's *Karukku (*1992), *Sangati (*1994), *Vanmam: Vendetta* (2003). It tries to explore the writers' experiences in the context of experiences of inequality, consciousness, Caste and Gender. The writer has an exclusive set of a realization of the subjugation based on her personal experiences in the oppressive world of caste system. Bama's writing is a record of her revolutionary voice in the Dalit feminism and it provides a critical view at large glance to the world of Dalit lives in India. The marginalization and exclusion on both patriarchal and social level was responsible for the centuries long muted sufferings of Dalit women. The researcher will also try to draw the consequence of self-questioning in the search of identity through their experiences in their struggle to achieve equality and liberation.

Chapter IV: Culture and Identity in the Novels under study: A Comparative Discourse

In this chapter, the researcher tries to show the content aspect of culture and identity in selected Black and Dalit women's novels by confronting their own experiences. Further, the researcher will point out the similarities and the dissimilarities between the select Dalit women writers and the African- American writers in the terms of strategies of self-empowerment, social reform and inspiring others to rise against human oppression.

The focus also will be drawn on how they recognized and revolted against their oppressions at the hands of various social and political institutions like racism, casteism, slavery, patriarchy and culture.

Chapter V: Conclusion

In the last chapter, the synoptic summary of all chapters will be given. Findings and conclusions of the present study and accomplishments of the objectives will be discussed in this chapter. In the conclusion, It will try to describe the implications and the scope for the further research.

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